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*Longfellow, Henry Wadsworth*

Longfellow's

# “The Birds of Killingworth”

ILLUSTRATED

WITH INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS, OUTLINE OF THE  
STORY, NOTES, QUESTIONS, AND SUGGES-  
TIONS FOR DRAMATIZATION

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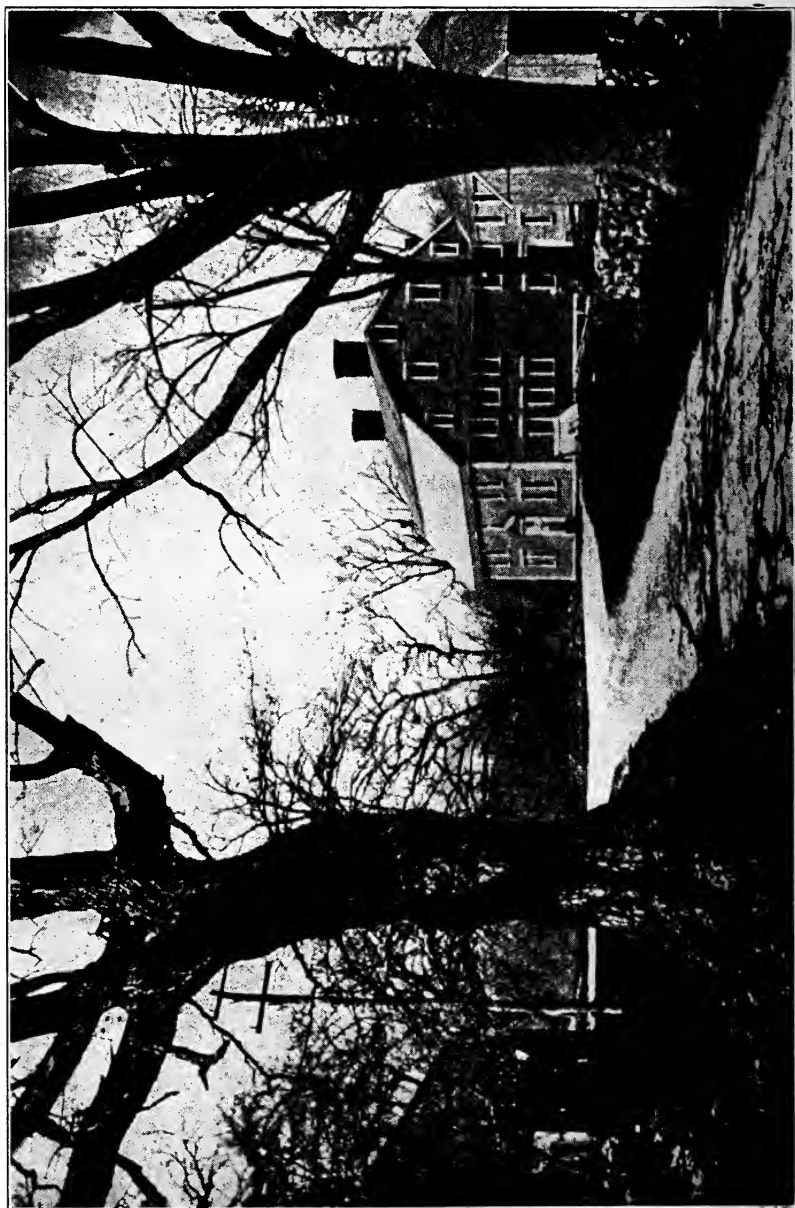
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
BRIEF SKETCH OF LONGFELLOW'S LIFE . . . . .	5
PLACE OF "THE BIRDS OF KILLINGWORTH" IN THE "TALES OF A WAYSIDE INN" . . . . .	5
LONGFELLOW'S PREPARATION FOR WRITING THE "TALES" .	5
PLAN OF THE "TALES OF A WAYSIDE INN" . . . . .	6
COMMENTS ON "THE BIRDS OF KILLINGWORTH" . . . . .	6
1. Source of the Story . . . . .	6
2. Meter and Stanza . . . . .	7
3. Theme, Etc. . . . .	7
OTHER BIRD POEMS BY LONGFELLOW . . . . .	7
A FEW BIRD POEMS BY OTHER AUTHORS . . . . .	8
OUTLINE OF THE STORY OF "THE BIRDS OF KILLINGWORTH"	8
THE POEM: "THE BIRDS OF KILLINGWORTH" . . . . .	11
NOTES . . . . .	21
QUESTIONS . . . . .	26
SUGGESTIONS FOR DRAMATIZATION . . . . .	31



*Brown's Famous Pictures, No. 459*

THE WAYSIDE INN, SUDBURY

## BRIEF SKETCH OF LONGFELLOW'S LIFE

The poem "The Birds of Killingworth" was written by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, America's most popular and well-known poet. Born in 1807 at Portland, Maine, Longfellow entered Bowdoin College at the age of fourteen, graduated four years later, studied law a short time, was appointed to the chair of modern languages at Bowdoin College, spent nearly four years in study in Europe, began teaching at Bowdoin at the age of twenty-two, and was said at that time to be the greatest scholar in America. He taught at Bowdoin six years, was called at the end of that time to the same work at Harvard College, spent another year in study abroad, and began his work at Harvard at the age of twenty-nine. After eighteen years of successful work there he resigned his professorship in order to devote his time to literature. He died in 1882, known, honored, and loved by the civilized world.

## PLACE OF "THE BIRDS OF KILLINGWORTH" IN THE "TALES OF A WAYSIDE INN"

"The Birds of Killingworth" is one of a group of story-poems known as "Tales of a Wayside Inn." The group is divided into three parts. Part One, which contains "The Birds of Killingworth," was published in 1863; Part Two, in 1872; and Part Three, a year later. There are seven stories in Part One; the same number in Part Two; and eight in Part Three.

## LONGFELLOW'S PREPARATION FOR WRITING THE "TALES"

One of Longfellow's greatest gifts was his ability to tell a story in verse and make it interesting. Another gift was his ability to master languages. He could read, write, and speak almost all the languages, ancient and modern, of the civilized world, and was familiar with all of the world's greatest literature. Looking over the table of contents of a volume of his poems, one

finds translations from the Spanish, Swedish, Danish, German, Anglo-Saxon, French, Portuguese, Latin, etc. Whenever, in reading the history or literature of his own or other countries, he came across incidents or events that pleased him, he loved to try his skill at writing them out in story-poems, and always succeeded in making them interesting and beautiful. In this way the material for the various "Tales" was collected. Hence, if you read all the twenty-two stories given in the "Tales of a Wayside Inn," you get wonderful glimpses into the history, romance, legend, etc., of many different ages and places.

#### PLAN OF THE "TALES OF A WAYSIDE INN"

The plan Longfellow worked out for presenting his "Tales" in an interesting way was as follows. He remembered that standing by the roadside in the town of Sudbury, about twenty-three miles from Boston, was a quaint old tavern. It was built for a home in early Colonial days by an English family of wealth and title, named Howe. A little later they lost their fortune, but the house remained in their possession and was maintained by the descendants of the family as an inn for a hundred and seventy-five years. It was called "The Howe Tavern" or, according to its sign, "The Red Horse Inn." Longfellow also remembered that some of his Boston friends were in the habit of going out to this inn occasionally for a holiday. So he asks his readers to imagine that a company of six of these friends, gathered at the inn on an autumn evening, relate the seven tales of Part One; that the next forenoon, being kept indoors by rain, they relate the seven tales of Part Two; the remaining eight being given in the evening. The friend who tells the story, "The Birds of Killingworth," is spoken of in the poem simply as "The Poet." But in a note Longfellow tells us that as the teller of this tale he had in mind a real poet friend, T. W. Parsons.

#### COMMENTS ON "THE BIRDS OF KILLINGWORTH"

*Source of the story.*—As has been suggested, the stories in the group of poems known as the "Tales of a Wayside Inn" were taken by Longfellow from the different literatures of the world

and made over by him into poems. The story of "The Birds of Killingworth" is the only one that is entirely his own invention. Killingworth is a small town in the southern part of Middlesex County, Connecticut. It is said that the early settlers in this town, as was the case in many other places, used to choose sides and form hunting parties to destroy the birds they believed to be harmful to their crops, the side that brought in the smaller number of dead birds being obliged to pay the bills for a banquet for both sides. After the birds began to grow scarce the practice was discontinued. With this slight hint as a foundation Longfellow invented the story of the poem.

*Meter and stanza.*—The metrical foot used in the poem is iambic, as each foot consists of two syllables, the second of which is accented.

Ĭt wās / the seā/son wĥēn / thrōugh áll / the lánd,

It will be seen that there are five of these iambic feet in each line. The meter is therefore iambic pentameter. The stanza of eight lines, with its alternating repetition of rhymes in the first six lines and its last two lines rhyming in couplets, is an Italian verse-form and has an Italian name—the *ottava rime* (pronounced *ôt-tă-vă rē-mă*). It is said to be "fitted for the comic vein as well as for ribaldry and cynicism." It is used by Byron in his cynical poem "Don Juan" and by many other poets. Longfellow uses it in another one of the "Tales"—the one entitled "The Monk of Casal-Maggiore." He doubtless uses it in "The Birds of Killingworth" because he wishes to speak humorously of some of the scenes and characters in this poem.

*Theme, etc.*—The theme of "The Birds of Killingworth" is the story told in the poem. For central thought and climax, see "Questions."

#### OTHER BIRD POEMS BY LONGFELLOW

Walter von der Vogelweid.

The Statue over the Cathedral Door.

The Emperor's Bird's-Nest.

The Sermon of St. Francis.

Prelude to Part Three, "Tales of a Wayside Inn."

The Legend of the Crossbill.

## A FEW BIRD POEMS BY OTHER AUTHORS

To a Waterfowl	William Cullen Bryant
Robert of Lincoln	William Cullen Bryant
The Titmouse	Ralph Waldo Emerson
The Sandpiper	Celia Thaxter
To a Skylark	Percy Bysshe Shelley
The Belfry Pigeon	N. P. Willis
To a Skylark	William Wordsworth
The Jackdaw of Rheims	Thomas Ingoldsby
The Return of the Birds	William Cullen Bryant

Teachers should write to the Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C., and ask for Bulletin No. Thirteen entitled *Some Common Birds in Their Relation to Agriculture*, also Bulletin No. Fifty-four, *Some Common Birds*. A magazine called *Bird Lore* is published at Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, and costs only one dollar per year. The bulletins from Washington cost nothing.

## OUTLINE

*Introduction.*

Season of the year; the time; the place; introduction of the principal characters (the birds); their liveliness and joy (ll. 1-26).

*The story.*

Alarm of the farmers and their dreadful resolve (ll. 27-32).

Calling of the town meeting and its purpose (ll. 33-40).

People who assembled for the meeting; the place where it was held (ll. 41-74).

The meeting called to order; many bitter speeches made against the birds (ll. 75-80).

The Preceptor getting up courage to speak in defense of the birds (ll. 81-88).

*The Preceptor's speech.*

Plain statement of the murderous intentions of the meeting and of the innocence of the little creatures who make free music for those who are planning to kill them (ll. 89-104).

He reminds them: (a) of the smallness of the crime for which the birds are to be slaughtered (ll. 105-112); (b) of how wonderful these creatures of God are, as shown by the language they speak and the homes they build (ll. 113-120); (c) of how faithfully their joyous concert is given each morning, of how, like the sweet air and the sunshine, their music daily encircles the earth (ll. 121-128); (d) of what their homes and harvests would be like without the birds (ll. 129-136); (e) of the contrast between the bird music and the noise of the harmful insects that will multiply and fill the land if the birds are destroyed (ll. 137-144); (f) that the birds, even the blackest of them, the crows, are guarding their farms and destroying the enemies of their crops (ll. 145-152); (g) that he cannot teach their children gentleness, mercy, and reverence for life while they see their fathers engaged in useless and cruel destruction of life (ll. 153-160).

Disapproval of the audience at the close of the address (ll. 161-168).

Approval of another audience which reads instead of hearing the speech (ll. 169-176).

The slaughter (ll. 177-184).

Coming of summer and effect of the killing of the birds: (a) on the country (ll. 185-192); (b) on the town (ll. 193-200).

Change of mind on the part of the farmers; repeal of the law (ll. 201-208).

Effect of the bird slaughter on the beauty of autumn (ll. 201-208).

Nature mourning the death of her children (ll. 213-216).

The next spring; another town meeting; anxious search for birds; the newly-found birds liberated in Killingworth; their joyous songs (ll. 217-232).

Conclusion: The Preceptor's marriage, the birds of Killingworth furnishing the music.



## THE BIRDS OF KILLINGWORTH

It was the season, when through all the land  
The merle and mavis build, and building sing  
Those lovely lyrics, written by His hand,  
Whom Saxon Caedmon calls the Blithe-heart King;  
5 When on the boughs the purple buds expand,  
The banners of the vanguard of the Spring,  
And rivulets, rejoicing, rush and leap,  
And wave their fluttering signals from the steep.

The robin and the blue-bird,  
    piping loud,  
10 Filled all the blossoming or-  
    chards with their glee;  
The sparrows chirped as if they  
    still were proud



ROBIN

Their race in Holy Writ should mentioned be;  
And hungry crows assembled in a crowd,  
Clamored their piteous prayer incessantly,  
15 Knowing who hears the raven's cry, and said:  
"Give us, O Lord, this day our daily bread!"

Across the Sound the birds of passage sailed,  
Speaking some unknown language strange and sweet  
Of tropic isle remote, and passing hailed  
20 The village with the cheers of all their fleet;  
Or quarrelling together, laughed and railed  
Like foreign sailors, landed in the street  
Of seaport town, and with outlandish noise  
Of oaths and gibberish frightening girls and boys.

---

### ROBIN

The dooryard companion. His coming is one of the first signs of spring. He loves to take shower baths in the rain or in the spray of the garden hose. Watch him run across the lawn, or behind the plow, cock his head on one side, and rear back as he pulls a long earthworm from the moist soil. His red breast indicates the merry heart within as he sings, "Cheerily—cheer-up! Cheerily—cheer-up!"

- 25 Thus came the jocund Spring in Killingworth,  
 In fabulous days, some hundred years ago;  
 And thrifty farmers, as they tilled the earth,  
 Heard with alarm the cawing of the crow,  
 That mingled with the universal mirth,  
 30 Cassandra-like, prognosticating woe;  
 They shook their heads, and doomed with dreadful  
 words  
 To swift destruction the whole race of birds.



EUROPEAN SONG-THRUSH (MAVIS)

- And a town-meeting was convened  
 straightway  
 To set a price upon the guilty heads  
 Of these marauders, who, in lieu of pay,  
 Levied black-mail upon the garden  
 beds  
 And corn-fields, and beheld without dismay  
 The awful scarecrow, with his fluttering shreds;  
 The skeleton that waited at their feast,  
 40 Whereby their sinful pleasure was increased.

- Then from his house, a temple painted white,  
 With fluted columns, and a roof of red,  
 The Squire came forth, august and splendid sight!  
 Slowly descending, with majestic tread,  
 45 Three flights of steps, nor looking left nor right,  
 Down the long street he walked, as one who said,  
 "A town that boasts inhabitants like me  
 Can have no lack of good society!"

---

EUROPEAN SONG-THRUSH (*Mavis*)

He belongs to a very large family, all of whom help the farmer by destroying worms and insects.

The Parson, too, appeared, a man austere,  
50 The instinct of whose nature was to kill;  
The wrath of God he preached from year to year,  
And read, with fervor, Edwards on the Will;  
His favorite pastime was to slay the deer  
In Summer on some Adirondac hill;  
55 E'en now, while walking down the rural lane,  
He lopped the wayside lillies with his cane.

From the Academy, whose belfry crowned  
The hill of Science with its vane of brass,  
Came the Preceptor, gazing idly round,  
60 Now at the clouds, and now at the  
green grass,  
And all absorbed in reveries profound  
Of fair Almira in the upper class,  
Who was, as in a sonnet he had said,  
As pure as water, and as good as bread.



BLUEBIRD

65 And next the Deacon issued from his door,  
In his voluminous neck-cloth, white as snow;  
A suit of sable bombazine he wore;  
His form was ponderous, and his step was slow;  
There never was so wise a man before;  
70 He seemed the incarnate "Well, I told you so!"  
And to perpetuate his great renown  
There was a street named after him in town.

## BLUEBIRD

The good-luck bird and a true harbinger of spring. He seems indeed like a patch of sunshine and blue sky as the sun flashes across his back and rosy breast. He likes to nest in a box posted in the branches of an old apple tree in the orchard, where he feeds on the insects that harm the crop. His song is plaintive but sweet, and very welcome to his friends.

- These came together in the new town-hall,  
 With sundry farmers from the region round.  
 75 The Squire presided, dignified and tall,  
 His air impressive and his reasoning sound;  
 Ill fared it with the birds, both great and small;  
 Hardly a friend in all that crowd they found,  
 But enemies enough, who every one  
 80 Charged them with all the crimes beneath the sun.



SONG-SPARROW

- When they had ended, from his place apart,  
 Rose the Preceptor, to redress the  
 wrong,  
 And, trembling like a steed before the start,  
 Look round bewildered on the ex-  
 pectant throng;  
 85 Then thought of fair Almira, and took heart  
 To speak out what was in him, clear and strong,  
 Alike regardless of their smile or frown,  
 And quite determined not to be laughed down.
- "Plato, anticipating the Reviewers,  
 90 From his Republic banished without pity  
 The Poets; in this little town of yours,  
 You put to death, by means of a Committee,  
 The ballad-singers and the Troubadours,  
 The street-musicians of the heavenly city,  
 95 The birds, who make sweet music for us all  
 In our dark hours, as David did for Saul.

## SONG-SPARROW

The American optimist. Almost before the snow has melted, he appears in your hedge. In heat or cold, in sunshine or shower, this cheerful little fellow pipes us a merry strain in a great variety of notes. His head is tilted back, displaying a spotted breast with one large brown blotch in the center. When off duty, he is busy ridding the roadside of harmful insects and the seeds of noxious weeds.

"The thrush that carols at the dawn of day  
From the green steeples of the piny wood;  
The oriole in the elm; the noisy jay,  
100 Jargoning like a foreigner at his food;  
The blue-bird balanced on some top-most spray,  
Flooding with melody the neighborhood;  
Linnet and meadow-lark, and all the throng  
That dwell in nests, and have the gift of song.

105 "You slay them all! and wherefore?  
for the gain  
Of a scant handful more or less of  
wheat,  
Or fye, or barley, or some other grain,  
Scatched up at random by indus-  
trious feet,  
Searching for worm or weevil after rain!  
110 Or a few cherries, that are not so sweet  
As are the songs these uninvited guests  
Sing at their feast with comfortable breasts.



CROW

"Do you ne'er think what wondrous beings these?  
Do you ne'er think who made them, and who taught  
115 The dialect they speak, where melodies  
Alone are the interpreters of thought?  
Whose household words are songs in many keys,  
Sweeter than instrument of man e'er caught!  
Whose habitations in the tree-tops even  
120 Are halfway houses on the road to heaven!

## CROW

Although he is a well-known thief and must plead guilty to the charge of destroying many eggs of the other birds, yet he also includes in his diet many cutworms, wireworms, white grubs, and grasshoppers. His glossy, black coat and unusual size make him easily visible as he moves along in a leisurely, flapping flight over the woods and fields.

"Think, every morning when the sun peeps through  
 The dim leaf-latticed windows of the grove,  
 How jubilant the happy birds renew  
 Their old, melodious madrigals of love!

125 And when you think of this, remember too  
 'Tis always morning somewhere, and above  
 The awakening continents, from shore to shore,  
 Somewhere the birds are singing evermore.



RAVEN

"Think of your woods and orchards with-  
 out birds!

Of empty nests that cling to boughs and  
 beams

As in an idiot's brain remembered words  
 Hang empty 'mid the cobwebs of his  
 dreams!

Will bleat of flocks or bellowing of herds

Make up for the lost music, when your teams

135 Drag home the stingy harvest, and no more  
 The feathered gleaners follow to your door?

"What! would you rather see the incessant stir  
 Of insects in the windrows of the hay,  
 And hear the locust and the grasshopper

140 Their melancholy hurdy-gurdies play?

Is this more pleasant to you than the whir-  
 Of meadow-lark, and its sweet roundelay,  
 Or twitter of little field-fares, as you take  
 Your nooning in the shade of bush and brake?

---

#### RAVEN

The raven, a first cousin of our common crow, is distinguished by his size, being twenty-five inches in length. To bird hunters he is known as a dweller in the eastern United States, but to poets like Poe, who are impressed by his sense of mystery, he is a "ghastly, grim, and ancient Raven, wandering from the nighty shore."

145 "You call them thieves and pillagers; but know  
 They are the winged wardens of your farms,  
 Who from the cornfields drive the insidious foe  
 And from your harvests keep a hundred harms;  
 Even the blackest of them all, the crow,  
 150 Renders good service as your man-at-arms,  
 Crushing the beetle in his coat of mail,  
 And crying havoc on the slug and snail.

"How can I teach your children gentleness,  
 And mercy to the weak, and rever-  
 ence  
 155 For Life, which, in its weakness or  
 excess,  
 Is still a gleam of God's omnipotence,  
 Or Death, which, seeming darkness, is no less  
 The selfsame light, although averted hence,  
 When by your laws, your actions, and your speech,  
 160 You contradict the very things I teach?"



ORCHARD ORIOLE

With this he closed; and through the audience went  
 A murmur, like the rustle of dead leaves;  
 The farmers laughed and nodded, and some bent  
 Their yellow heads together like their sheaves;  
 165 Men have no faith in fine-spun sentiment  
 Who put their trust in bullocks and in beeves.  
 The birds were doomed; and, as the record shows,  
 A bounty offered for the heads of crows.

## ORCHARD ORIOLE

Watch the tops of the elms in the early part of May. His orange-and-black dress and his peculiar call will reveal his whereabouts. He sings his song by snatches between meals, which consist chiefly of caterpillars and the boll weevil. He loves bits of bright-colored string to weave into his long nest which swings, cradle-like, from the under side of a swaying branch.

- There was another audience out of reach,  
 170 Who had no voice nor vote in making laws,  
 But in the papers read his little speech,  
 And crowned his modest temples with applause;  
 They made him conscious, each one more than each,  
 He still was victor, vanquished in their cause.  
 175 Sweetest of all the applause he won from thee,  
 O fair Almira at the Academy!



BLUE JAY

- And so the dreadful massacre began;  
 O'er fields and orchards, and o'er woodland  
 crests,  
 The ceaseless fusillade of terror ran.  
 Dead fell the birds, with bloodstains on their  
 breasts,  
 Or wounded crept away from sight of man,  
 While the young died of famine in their nests;  
 A slaughter to be told in groans, not words,  
 The very St. Bartholomew of Birds!
- 185 The Summer came, and all the birds were dead;  
 The days were like hot coals; the very ground  
 Was burned to ashes; in the orchards fed  
 Myriads of caterpillars, and around  
 The cultivated fields and garden beds  
 190 Hosts of devouring insects crawled, and found  
 No foe to check their march, till they had made  
 The land a desert without leaf or shade.

---

 BLUE JAY

He is so handsome in his brilliant blue coat edged with black that we may excuse him for being so saucy and quarrelsome. Besides his familiar scolding "Jay! Jay!" learn to recognize his wooing note which is soft and coaxing; his "bottle song," imitating the sound of blowing into a bottle; and his "teeter" song as he bobs up and down on a limb. He is fond of soft-shelled nuts, wood-boring beetles, and larvae.

Devoured by worms, like Herod, was the town,  
 Because, like Herod, it had ruthlessly  
 195 Slaughtered the Innocents. From the trees spun down  
 The canker-worms upon the passersby,  
 Upon each woman's bonnet, shawl, and gown,  
 Who shook them off with just a little cry;  
 They were the terror of each favorite walk,  
 200 The endless theme of all the village talk.

The farmers grew impatient, but a few  
 Confessed their error, and would not  
 complain,  
 For after all, the best thing one can do,  
 When it is raining, is to let it rain.  
 205 Then they repealed the law, although  
 they knew



REDPOLL OR LINNET

It would not call the dead to life again;  
 As schoolboys, finding their mistake too late,  
 Draw a wet sponge across the accusing slate.

That year in Killingworth the Autumn came  
 210 Without the light of his majestic look,  
 The wonder of the falling tongues of flame  
 The illumined pages of his Doom's-Day book.  
 A few lost leaves blushed crimson with their shame  
 And drowned themselves despairing in the brook,  
 215 While the wild wind went moaning everywhere,  
 Lamenting the dead children of the air!

#### REDPOLL OR AMERICAN LINNET

He gets his name from his tiny red cap and rosy breast which show  
 up plainly against the snowdrift, where he is to be found eating seeds  
 from the projecting grasses and weeds. He likes the cold and snow and  
 never ventures very far to the south. His song is something like that  
 of the canary or goldfinch.

But the next Spring a stranger sight was seen,  
 A sight that never yet by bard was sung,  
 As great a wonder as it would have been

220 If some dumb animal had found a tongue!  
 A wagon, overarched with evergreen,  
 Upon whose boughs were wicker cages hung,  
 All full of singing birds, came down the street,  
 Filling the air with music wild and sweet.



MEADOW LARK

From all the country round these birds  
 were brought,

By order of the town, with anxious quest,  
 And, loosened from their wicker prisons,  
 sought

In woods and fields the places they loved  
 best,

Singing loud canticles, which many thought

230 Were satires to the authorities addressed.  
 While others, listening in green lanes, averred  
 Such lovely music never had been heard!

But blither still and louder carolled they

Upon the morrow, for they seemed to know  
 235 It was the fair Almira's wedding-day,

And everywhere, around, above, below,  
 When the Preceptor bore his bride away,

Their songs burst forth in joyous overflow,  
 And a new heaven bent over a new earth

240 Amid the sunny farms of Killingworth.

---

MEADOW LARK

"See here! See here! Spring o' the year!" he sings as he perches on the fence post—awkward, ungainly, but alert. He wears a shield of black on his bright yellow breast and, as he flies away sputtering, displays white outer tail feathers. He is a persistent enemy of the alfalfa and boll weevils, cutworms, army worms, and grasshoppers.

## NOTES

- L. 2: *Merle and mavis*. The merle is a European blackbird. Mavis is an old name for a thrush common in most parts of Europe. They are often mentioned together by the English poets in connection with the sweetness of their song. The *Century Dictionary* quotes from *Child's Ballads*,

The mavis is the sweetest bird,  
Next to the nightingale;

also from Lowell,

Vernal Chaucer whose fresh woods  
Throb thick with merle and mavis all the year.

Longfellow doubtless used these names because of these poetical associations, perhaps having in mind some of our earliest spring birds.

- L. 3: *Lyric*. A poem expressed, or fit to be expressed, in song, giving the writer's own thoughts and feelings.
- L. 4: *Caedmon*. A poet belonging to the early Anglo-Saxon period of English literature. His greatest work is *A Metrical Paraphrase of the Scriptures*. In this poem he speaks of God as "the Blithe-heart King."
- L. 6: *Vanguard*. Foremost division of an army on the march. The figure is personification, and Spring is the army, whose "vanguard" is waving the buds as banners.
- L. 8: *Fluttering signals*. Mist or foam or the shine of the moving water.
- Ll. 11, 12: See Matt. 10:29-31. Christ, speaking to his disciples, says, "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore; ye are of more value than many sparrows." See also Luke 12:6-7.

- L. 15: *The raven's cry*. Ps. 147:9: "He giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry." Also Luke 12:24: "Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them."
- L. 16: Quoted from the Lord's Prayer (Matt. 6:11; Luke 11:3).
- L. 17: *Sound*. Long Island Sound. Killingworth is about ten miles north of the Sound.
- Ll. 21-24: *Outlandish*. Foreign, not native; hence strange, rude, barbarous. *Gibberish*. Akin to jabber. Rapid and inarticulate talk. Longfellow was born and grew up in a seaport town where ships from strange countries often came. He was probably frightened many times by the boisterous ways and odd "gibberish" of the sailors, for he more than once alludes to the strange ways of foreign sailors. In the poem "My Lost Youth" he says,

I remember the black wharves and the slips,  
 And the sea-tides tossing free,  
 And Spanish sailors with bearded lips,  
 And the beauty and mystery of the ships,  
 And the magic of the sea.

- L. 25: *Jocund*. Merry, sportive.
- L. 26: *Fabulous days*. This poem was written in 1863, hence the "fabulous days" must have been in 1763 or thereabouts. Many writers, when locating fictitious events in a real place, especially if it is not far from their own homes, find it convenient to put the time back in "fabulous days" for fear of resentment on the part of the people of the place.
- L. 30: *Cassandra*. A prophetess, the daughter of King Priam of Troy. Her prophecies, though always true, were never believed. She foretold the downfall of Troy.
- L. 39: *The skeleton*, etc. It is said that toward the close of banquets in Egypt a servant brought in a small skeleton and showed it to the guests saying, "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow ye die." This was supposed to increase their pleasure.

- L. 43: *Squire*. In England a country gentleman or the chief landed proprietor in a certain district; in rank below a knight. In the United States the word is used as a title of honor or courtesy and is often applied to a justice of the peace.
- L. 52: *Edwards on the Will*. The book referred to is a treatise entitled *The Freedom of the Will*. It was written by Jonathan Edwards, the greatest preacher and writer of Colonial times, and "the first American to acquire a reputation abroad by his pen." In this book as well as in his sermons Edwards has much to say about the anger and wrath of God.
- L. 57: *Academy*. One of those schools between the common school and the college which, in the early history of our country, partially supplied the place of the high school which had not yet come into existence.
- L. 58: *The hill of Science*. So called because of the academy building which crowned its top.
- L. 59: *Preceptor*. Principal or superintendent.
- L. 63: *Sonnet*. A lyric poem of fourteen lines, expressing the emotion of the writer. It was formerly the custom for lovers who could do so to write sonnets on the virtues and beauties of their lady-loves.
- L. 67: *Sable*. Here means black. *Bombazine*. A fine, twilled silk-and-wool material.
- Ll. 89, 90: *Plato*. A Greek philosopher who lived in the fourth century B.C. He wrote a book called the *Republic* in which he gave his ideals of government and society. *Reviewers*. Those who write comment or criticism on books for the periodicals. Longfellow probably refers to some of the writers of England who, during the earlier years of his life, had written severe criticism of Wordsworth and some of the other English poets. *Anticipating*. Here means acting sooner or earlier than someone else. Longfellow means to say in a humorous way in these lines that first Plato and then the reviewers tried to banish the poets.
- L. 93: *Troubadours*. Famous lyric poets of France, Italy, and Spain, who flourished in the thirteenth century. They wrote

chiefly of love. Both ballad-singers and troubadours were loved by the people.

- L. 94: *Heavenly city*. The air.
- L. 96: *Saul*. King of Israel. *David*. A shepherd lad who afterward became king of Israel. See I Sam. 16: 22, 23.
- L. 100: *Jargoning*. Uttering unintelligible sounds.
- L. 109: *Weevil*. A small beetle which in the larva form is very destructive to roots, fruits, and grain.
- L. 117: *Songs in many keys*. In 1861, about two years before this poem was written, Holmes published a small volume of poems entitled *Songs in Many Keys*.
- L. 124: *Madrigal*. A short love song; an old-fashioned term used often in poetry in speaking of the songs of the birds.
- L. 140: *Hurdy-gurdy*. Originally a peculiar musical instrument played by turning a resined crank, and giving forth a melancholy, droning sound; now "any instrument of a droning sound played by means of a handle, as the barrel organ" (*Standard Dictionary*).
- L. 143: *Field-fare*. A European thrush.
- L. 150: *Man-at-arms*. A mounted soldier very heavily armed.
- L. 151: *Coat-of-mail*. A metal outer garment or coat worn for defense.
- L. 152: *Crying havoc*. Havoc is destruction let loose. To "cry havoc" was formerly, in war and in hunting, to give a signal for carnage and destruction. In Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, Antony, in his oration over the body of the slain Caesar, is made to say,

And Caesar's spirit, ranging for revenge,  
With Até by his side, come hot from hell,  
Shall in these confines, with a monarch's voice,  
Cry *Havoc*, and let loose the dogs of war.

- L. 177: *Massacre*. Reckless and wholesale slaughter of the defenseless.
- L. 179: *Fusillade*. A continuous discharge of firearms.
- L. 184: A massacre of French Protestants which took place in Paris and the provinces and began on St. Bartholomew's

Day, August 24, 1572. The *Century Dictionary* states that the number of victims is estimated as between 20,000 and 30,000.

- Ll. 193-195: For an account of the slaughter of the innocents by Herod the Great see Matt. 2:16, 17. But it was his grand-son, Herod Agrippa, who was "eaten of worms and gave up the ghost." For an account of this see Acts 12:21-23.
- L. 196: *Canker-worm*. A caterpillar destructive to shade trees and fruit trees.
- L. 211: *Falling tongues of flame*. See Acts 2:2-4. By "falling tongues of flame" Longfellow here means red autumn leaves. The figure is metaphor.
- L. 212: *Illumined*. Decorated in rich colors with ornamental letters, scrolls, etc. Very beautiful work in illuminating manuscripts used to be done by monks in convents. Longfellow thinks of the autumn leaves as manuscripts richly illuminated in colors. In his poem "To a Child" he speaks of—

the old apple-tree,  
With its o'erhanging golden canopy  
Of leaves *illuminate* with autumnal hues.

*Doom's-Day book*. Doom's-Day is the day of judgment. The name Doom's-Day book was a nickname given by the people to a registration of all the lands in his kingdom made by William the Conqueror. Autumn is here personified by the poet as a monarch and the leaves are the pages of his book. Perhaps it is, in the figure, a Doom's-Day book, because the color of its pages indicates the coming of the end of the year.

- L. 222: *Wicker*. Made of plaited twigs.
- L. 229: *Canticles*. Little songs; hymns sung in worship.
- L. 239: See Isa. 65:17-25: "For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth. . . . They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the Lord."

## QUESTIONS

[EDITOR'S NOTE.—These questions are intended, not so much as a test of the pupil's knowledge, as to help him to see things in the poem that he had not before noticed. They do not cover the information contained in the introductory material or the notes. Such questions should therefore be added by the teacher. The numbers refer to the lines of the poem.]

How does the poet, ll. 1-4, suggest that the songs of the birds are specially prepared by God himself as a gift to humanity? What three things are mentioned in ll. 1-8 as doing something to show that it is spring? Is it late or early spring? How proved? The birds are called what in l. 6? The figure is personification. Spring is a queen, marching on, her vanguard waving purple banners.

What birds of early spring are mentioned in ll. 9-16? Give the verb used to describe the song or cry of each. In what way does the poet in these lines contrive to throw around the birds sacred associations and remind us that they are represented in the Bible as being under the special care of God? What effect does the poet mean this to have on our feeling toward those who destroy them?

What are birds of passage? In what two or three ways do they, in ll. 17-24, show friendliness to the people of the village as they pass over? By the use of the expressions, "sailed," "speaking . . . language," "hailed village with cheers of fleet," the poet personifies the birds as human beings, sailors. In ll. 21-24 the figure is changed to simile. What memories of his boyhood in ll. 21-24?

Meaning of "fabulous" in l. 26? Why should the farmers be more alarmed by the notes of the crow than by those of other birds? Why was it particularly necessary for the farmers in those days to be sure of pretty good crops? Was it ignorance of the value of the birds, or love of what they called sport, or just pure cruelty that made them determine (ll. 31-32) to kill all the birds?

For what purpose was this solemn meeting of all the men of the town called (ll. 33-36)? Does the poet mean to have us see that the whole performance was a little ridiculous? What is it to set a price upon the head of anything or anybody? What two charges, in ll. 35-40, were brought against the birds? What is it to levy blackmail? Why did the sight of the scarecrow increase the pleasure of the birds as they ate the corn?

Is there anything in the description of the Squire (ll. 41-48) to indicate that his house was built as a "temple" in which to worship himself? In whose opinion was he an "august and splendid sight" as he majestically descended the three flights of steps and took his way along the street? Why look neither to the right nor left since there were probably other people on the street? Why does Longfellow make so much fun of him? What particular thing about himself is he conceited over? And all this majestic aristocracy is on its way to the town meeting to fight against what? Show the way in which he walked down the street.

Meaning of "austere," l. 49? What four things are told about the Parson to show his cruel nature? On which side in this quarrel against the birds would you expect a parson to be?

What difference between the gaze of the Preceptor as he went to the meeting and that of the Squire as he went? What ails the young man that he gazes at clouds and grass, is in a deep reverie, and writes sonnets? Is his mind engaged in planning vengeance against the birds? Is it any discredit to the fair Almira to be compared by her lover to things so useful and necessary as bread and water? By bringing in this suggestion of a love story the poet increases the interest.

Who next (ll. 65-72) appears on the scene? In whose opinion was there never so wise a man before? What particular thing in himself is he conceited about? Why does the poet make fun of him? Of these four personages which one represents the civil authority, or the government? the church? the school? Which institution is on the right side of the question? Which of the four characters does Longfellow most dislike? Which one is most proud of his rank and authority? Which one is most proud of

his wisdom? Try to impersonate the walk of each one on his way to the meeting.

Aside from these dignitaries who else (l. 74) came to the meeting? What does the fact that the town hall was new (l. 73) indicate as to the age of the town itself? Give your ideas as to the kind of speeches the Squire, the Parson, and the Deacon each made in the meeting. Of what would the farmers be most likely to speak?

Who (ll. 81-88) was the most courageous man in the meeting? Why, probably, did he occupy a place apart? Why tremble? What indicates that he knew the fair Almira would be disappointed in him if he did not speak out in defense of the birds? What effect did the thought of Almira have upon him? What is your opinion of Almira by this time?

The Preceptor, in beginning his speech (ll. 89-96), has to fall back on his learning, but he finally makes a good start by showing his audience that they are just as foolish, and more cruel, in killing the birds in their town than Plato was in banishing the poets from his Republic. What other point does he make in favor of the birds (ll. 95, 96), which is gained from his knowledge of the Bible? What did David's music do for Saul? "The Birds" (l. 95), and "thrush," "oriole," "jay," "bluebird," "linnet," and "meadow lark," in ll. 97-104, are all direct objects of what verb?

On what part of what kind of tree (ll. 97, 98) does the Preceptor mean to say that the thrush sings at dawn? What indications are there in ll. 97-104 that the Preceptor himself was something of a poet? that he was a close observer of nature? Does he make any mistakes in what he says about the birds in these lines?

What does he show in ll. 105-112 that the birds are really searching for when they destroy the grain? Why "after rain" in l. 109? He shows that the birds pay how for the cherries they eat?

What answer would you have to make to the question in l. 113? The poet (ll. 114-120) speaks of birds' songs and of their nests as wonderful. Can you think of any other wonderful things about the birds? Had the Preceptor's audience apparently ever thought much about these things?

How (ll. 121-124) does the speaker show that the birds are faithful in their task of making music for the world? To what part of our country do morning, the sunshine, and the bird songs come first? Which way do they travel across our "awakening continent"? This stanza (ll. 121-128) is one of the most beautiful in the poem and should be committed to memory.

What argument in ll. 129-152 appeals to the pocket-book and probably moved the Preceptor's listeners more than anything else he said?

What three things in ll. 153-155 was the Preceptor trying to teach the children? What is said about life in ll. 155, 156? It is very important that these two lines be understood, for they contain the central thought of the entire poem. "Still" is used here in the sense of always, and "omnipotence" means unlimited power. The lines mean that life, in either the least or the greatest thing, always shows God's infinite power. We can see that this is true, for we know that while human beings can destroy life, as in a bird, an insect, or a blade of grass, they cannot make one of these things alive again. The Preceptor's whole speech is an effort to make the men see that they have no right to destroy the life which God has taken such infinite pains to create. Ll. 153-160 should also be committed to memory.

Did the town meeting applaud when the Preceptor ended his speech? In what ways did the men show that they were still determined to kill the birds? Would you expect these men to be very kind or polite to anyone whose ideas were not the same as their own?

Who did give him kind words and approval (ll. 169-176)? And the kindest words of all came from whom? Judging from what is said in ll. 173-174, what do you imagine the women said to the Preceptor when they chanced to meet him after they had read his speech? In l. 169 the poet tells us that the "other audience," the women, were "out of reach," that is, they were out of reach of the town meeting and of the possibility of helping to decide whether or not the birds should be slaughtered. Prove from ll. 185-200, and ll. 209-216 that they were not out of reach of any of the bad results that followed.

Describe the massacre and its effects on the birds. How much time passes between the events given in ll. 177-184 and those given in ll. 185-192? Describe fully the effects of the slaughter on the country (ll. 185-192); on the town (ll. 193-200).

The farmers grew impatient (l. 201) about what? And all but a few of them complained about what? When they finally repealed the bird law what were they compelled to remember that they could not do?

Did their trouble end when the summer ended? Write a paragraph describing the kind of autumn they had, one without either autumn coloring or falling leaves, showing also how the few remaining leaves and the winds mourned the loss of the birds.

At what time of the year does the action of the poem open? At what time of year does it close? How much time then does the entire action cover? What law did the men of Killingworth pass in a town meeting in the first spring of the story? What kind of a law do they pass (ll. 225-226) in another town meeting in the second spring of the poem? Contrast the scene of ll. 177-179 with that of ll. 217-226. Contrast the condition of the birds in ll. 180-184 with that in ll. 227-232. How does the poet contrive, in the last stanza, to unite the two stories of the poem, the story of the lovers and the story of the birds? How must the feeling among the men about the Preceptor's speech have changed?

If we consider this story to be a little tragicomedy (drama of mixed tragic and comic elements), the climax or culmination is found in the massacre of the birds (ll. 177-184). After this the bad results which teach the people their mistake begin and continue through the summer, autumn, and winter, until finally the dénouement or happy ending is reached in the last town meeting, the anxious search through the country for more birds, their liberation, their joyous songs, and the Preceptor's marriage.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR DRAMATIZATION

After a thorough study of the poem, it might easily be worked up by the class into a little play, something as follows:

*Characters*, The Squire, Parson, Deacon, Preceptor, farmers, wives of all, and Almira.

*Scene i*, On the Way to the Town Meeting: Place, a street in Killingworth. The words Town Hall over a door at the end. Flowers stuck in boxes of sand for the Parson to lop with his cane. Characters enter singly and walk to meeting as described in poem, some other people in the street, farmers bringing up the rear.

*Scene ii*, The Town Meeting, as in poem: Let the class write speeches for each character, one or two farmers making speeches, and the Preceptor giving his in full as in poem. After speeches, motions to choose sides, shoot birds, have banquet, offer bounty for crows, etc.

*Scene iii*, A Sewing Circle: Wives of all and Almira present. Unfavorable comment on the action of the town meeting; account of the Preceptor's speech given and received with cheers, etc. Some remarks made to Almira about her lover; he calls for her, and they leave together. Curtain.

*Scene iv*, Second Town Meeting (a year later). Women all there. Mournful speeches made telling what has happened because of loss of birds. Preceptor proposes search for more birds; is loudly cheered; motion passed. Preceptor and Almira asked to stand, and speech of gratitude made to them by the Squire. Curtain falls.





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